RESEARCH PLAN PROPOSAL

GENDER, TRADITION AND MODERNITY IN SELECTED NOVELS OF NAYANTARA SAGHAL

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Tentative Title

Gender, Tradition and Modernity in Selected Novels of Nayantara Sahgal

Research Problem

I have set myself the task of trying to understand Nayantara Sahgal's novels in terms of how her women characters respond to the phenomena of change. How do they cope with the rival pulls of tradition and modernity in their search for identity, independence, fulfillment, and love whether within marriage or outside it? How, in their journey to selfhood, do they negotiate with various personal, social, religious, and political issues? At the same time I would also like to examine how men in Sahgal's novels respond to the emergence of the new woman, with acceptance or with resistance.

Definition of Terms

"Feminism": is defined as cultural, economic and political movements that are focused towards establishing legal protection and complete equality for women.

"Gender": refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviour, activities and attribute that a particular society considers appropriate for men and women.

"Tradition": The transmission of custom or beliefs from generation to generation that have not changed for a long time.

"Modernity": Modernity is the condition of modern man's life that is alienation and fragmentation or the state or quality of being modern that is different from traditional styles.

"The new woman": A term coined around the turn of the 20th century to denote the emergence of women into the public sphere, a term closely associated with the suffrage movement, and connoting profound social transformations of the time.

Tradition and Modernity has been the one of the major themes in the Indian English novel. For instance in the novels of U.R Annanthamurthy, Raja Rao, R.K Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand etc.

Annanthamurthy's fiction is about the tussle between tradition and modernity and he has documented the corruption of tradition. And there is a move towards respecting a certain kind of tradition than the available modernity. In his fiction he talks about social, religion and culture in context of tradition which is followed with blind fervor. Like Annanthamurthy, Mulk Raj Anand makes us aware of traditional vices that hamper us in our attempts to become a progressive and modern nation. R. K Narayan also looks critically at tradition. According to him modernity is a new kind of subjectivity that

emerged in India after the impact of British culture. In his novels traditionalism is challenged by characters that entertain a more modern outlook and work to resist traditional, religious and familial duties.

Scope of Study

My research work will be confined to the following eight novels of Nayantara Sahgal.

Rich Like Us

Mistaken Identity

Plans for Departure

The Day in Shadow

A Time to be Happy

A Situation in New Delhi

This Time of Morning

Storm in Chandigarh

Most of these novels have women protagonists at their center. Her novels from *A Time to be Happy* to *Mistaken Identity* show her deep concern with the parlous state of women in the patriarchal society. Many of women characters rise against the stultifying culture which impedes women's progress and rebel against all attempts to elide women's pivotal role in the family and society. These women characters are victims of a conventional society which does not permit women to hold their own and considers the very issue of identity crisis as preposterous apropos women.

The character of Simrit in novel *The Day in Shadow* breaks free from the shackles of oppression and there is no sense of remorse in her. Sonali Ranade (*Rich Like Us*), Anna Hanson (*Plans for Departure*) and the nameless but certainly not faceless ranee of Vijaygarh (*Mistaken Identity*), dares to differ from the praxis of the patriarchal society. All these women characters abide by the fossilized concept of male supremacy and seek to deflate male superiority successfully, unaided by a man. In a male dominated society these women hoist the flag of gender-equality and seek carte blanche for their race.

Rich Like Us is a key novel to consider if we are examining how the women characters respond to the tradition- modernity issue. In *Rich Like Us* the character of Sonali represents the best of modern India and also the Indian womanhood. She combines the finest Indian traditions with the positive aspects of modernity. She is aware of the evil of traditional Hinduism because her grandmother became a Sati. The grandmother is a virtuous woman for whom virtue is courage, not self sacrifice. She is marginalized, treated unfairly by the system. Her survival in the end is a sign of hope for modern India.

Rose, the other character in the same novel represents that portion of Britain which loved India and was willing to suffer for it. Ram is Hinduism or India trapped between the past and the present, tradition and modernity, India and the west. He is aligned both to traditional India (Mona) and the Western modernity (Rose). Ram also represents patriarchal values.

The thirst for identity is not a problem facing the Indian Women only. Anna Hansen of *Plans for Departure* is a Danish woman, free from the shackles that women in a patriarchal society face, yet she comes to India when she wants to "break out" and be herself. She is despaired to think of her epitaph as:

> "Here lies Anna, beloved wife, who died without having made much effort to live, and nobody noticed the difference, since being a beloved wife was supposed to be reward enough."

Her zeal for emancipation forces to leave the warm embraces not only of home but also of a country. She'd rather face hostilities in a foreign land than be a slave in her own surroundings, to her own people.

The novel *The Day in Shadow* also exposes the cruel face of society. It also exposes the chauvinism intrinsic in the modern male who believes himself to be liberal – minded, educated but considers wife as a commodity as a possession not a person.

The novel deals with the struggle of young, beautiful and daring Indian women trapped under the burden of a brutal divorce settlement and the agony and unhappiness she experiences at the hands of cruel and unjust male dominated society of India. Her husband Som also has a cruel face of male domination in our society. He tries to be modern in each and every manner and blindly imitates the western style of life. Som wants Simrit to act as a traditional wife and to his ideal of subdued womanhood. It is tradition in Som that urges him to believe that woman has to live under the control of man.

Ram's father Lala ji (*Rich Like Us*) represents the good, uncompromising older generation or in a sense represents real Indian tradition. But he accepts Rose. In this way Rose and Lala ji together build up the fortunes of the family. This means that the new Indian state is built upon the foundations of the real Indian tradition and modernity learned from the British. Dev, the other character in the same novel is representing the worst aspects of Indian Tradition. He represents violence selfishness and cruelty. His killing of Rose suggests not only that he is immoral but he has no lessons and no sense of modernity. So there is a degree of characters in Sahgal's novels that represents tradition and modernity.

As a writer with feminist concerns, Nayantara Sahgal is a progeny of the tradition wherein power itself is defined as goddess "Shakti" a female symbol. Her novels seek to posit the independent existence of women and atrophy all attempts to preclude them from the centre stage of human existence. She believes:

> "Through the rewriting women do, new Sitas and Savitris will arise, stripped of false sanctity and crowned with the human virtue of courage. Then at last we will know why they did, and how their lone remote struggles can help our search for identity and emancipation."

Though Sahgal is not a militant feminist she feels strongly about female- exploitation and male sarcasm towards the issue of women's identity crisis. She demands social justice for women, and her focus is on her freedom.

Nehru and Gandhian legacy has also played an important role in Sahgal's novels. Most of her novels set against the backdrop of pivotal events of Indian History include *A Time to Be Happy*; *Storm in Chandigarh*; *A Situation in New Delhi* and *Rich Like Us* etc.

Review of Literature

Margaret Walters, *Feminism: A very short Introduction*: This book has a historical account of feminism that looks at the roots of feminism and the rights of women that helps in understanding of background of feminism.

Clara A.B.Joseph, *The Agent In The Margin:* Nayantara Sahgal's Gandhian Fiction: In this book Clara A.B.Joseph introduces Mahatma Gandhiji's political, philosophical and non-structuralist aspects of Louis Athusser's theories of ideology to trace how characters marginalized by gender, class, race and language in Sahgal's work

assume agency, challenging Poststructuralist theories of cultural and ideological determinism.

Swarup Sarkar in "Women's Role in Promoting Gender Equality" says that evolving process of gender equality involves both men and women. However, addressing gender equality from the women's perspective is essential as women have much to give and gain from gender equality. Gender inequalities are still one of the prime concerns in an advancing nation. India is still awaiting its tryst with its developmental destiny.

Kamaal Nishant in "Tradition and Modernity in India" says that the new generation of every age has regarded tradition as obsolete. Therefore, tradition is considered unnecessary to the need and the ethos of the modern times. On the other hand, the old generation of every age criticizes and condemns modernity. They feel that it is out to corrupt the new generation and hence remain traditional in outlook. The traditionalists find modernity unacceptable and harmful to the new generation. They point out the undesirable changes that have cropped into human relationships. This article helps me because its thematize on tradition and modernity which is the theme of my thesis.

Makarand R. Paranjape, *Indian Texts and Traditions in English*: In this book Paranjape has talked about the different treatment of tradition and modernity by different writers from different perspective.

Shari Daya, "Embodying modernity: Reading narratives of Indian women's sexual autonomy and violation": This article has shown how public discourses that construct the 'new Indian woman' raise important questions about how we understand the nature of the modern self, and how that understanding is gendered. References are often made in contemporary Indian discourse, both popular and academic, to the 'new Indian woman', a subject position that is seen as coterminous with the emerging identity of the Indian nation as

modern. This article unpacks key discourses that construct the ‘new woman’ in the public imagination and suggests that the modernity of this imagined figure is founded upon a notion of autonomy that is deeply embodied.

Makarand Paranjape, “The crisis of contemporary India and Nayantara Sahgal's fiction”: According to him one way of characterizing modern India would be by considering it a society in transition, a great tradition. He says that the story of modern India itself is a tradition-modernity story. Every novel, every poem, every work of art in modern India, then, either explicitly or implicitly, is one version and articulation of this big movement of our culture and nation. The tradition-modernity paradigm therefore defines our culture, and our culture in turn determines the thematic parameters of the texts which it generates through various authors.

Dr. Ram Sharma, “Identity crisis in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal”: Sahgal has presented in her novels modern Indian women's search for definitions about the self and society, and the relationships that are central to women. She portrays in her novels that her 'new woman is trying to search for her identity and wants to create for herself a new place in the society. She is conscious of her existence as an individual who has her own rights and wishes. She firmly asserts that these women are the ones who have the guts to raise their voice against it, hence creating awareness for the rest. "The new woman is assertive and self-willed searching to discover true self." Identity is a state of mind that is granted by our interaction with the fellow beings in the society. And a woman's identity crisis is that where she struggles to achieve as a human being in its full sense against those forces of society who bind her in chains and reject her as a being in comparison to man. Earlier, woman sought her identity in the relations of as a wife, mother and daughter. She accepted this identity willingly. But now time has changed and a woman rejects this relational identity. Now she is able to understand the duplicity of this identity that is

imposed on her by society so that she may restrain herself as a being. But now woman wants to stand on her feet as a full human being, equal to man in society.

Indira Gandhi: Her Road to Power by Nayantara Sahgal focuses on the political life of Indira Gandhi. *According* to her Gandhi's values differed from Jawaharlal Nehru. She also stresses on the fact that Gandhi created a highly centralized government under her command. This can be best seen in the Emergency of 1975-1977.

Nayantara Sahgal**,** *Jawaharlal Nehru: Civilizing A Savage World:* This book presents an intimate view of the influences encounters, and defining historical moments that forged the vision of Nehru. This book combines history with personal recollections to show how Nehru helped navigate India's transition from a colony to an influential modern nation. Discussing the significant issue of independent India's foreign policy - characterized by the non-alignment principle and the establishment of relations with the United States, Britain, the Soviet Union and China - Sahgal reveals much about Nehru's political astuteness, realism and aversion to rigid economic doctrines, as well as the profound impact India's non-aligned policy had on the world of the time.

There are so many researches have already done on gender, tradition and modernity, but there is no in-depth analysis of tradition and modernity from the point of view of man. And this is what I am going to do that nobody does.

Research Methods

My research methods will consist of comparing and contrasting primary sources. I will support my findings with a significant number of essay, articles on Nayantara Sahgal which deal specifically with the subject of gender, tradition and modernity.

Chapterisation

A tentative chapterisation would be as follows:

The study will consist of six chapters:-

The opening chapter will be an introductory nature. It will include the History of feminism and the contribution of many female writers in this field.

The second chapter will be an introduction to the lives and works of Nayantara Sahgal. And attempt will be made to make a critical survey of the works available on Nayantara Sahgal.

In the next chapter I will try to understand Sahgal's novels in terms of how her women characters respond to the phenomena of change.

The fourth chapter will deal with how the women characters of Sahgal's novels cope with the rival pulls of tradition and modernity in their search for identity and independence.

In the fifth chapter I would like to examine how men in Sahgal's novels respond to the emergence of the new woman with glad acceptance or with resistance.

The sixth chapter will be in the form of the summing up and an attempt will be made to answer the entire question raised in the previous chapters.

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